

that, by that time, the influence of Christianity from fort sites across the Danube frontier in the northern Balkans has completely disappeared. In any case, there is no doubt that signs incised on pots, spindle-whorls, and other categories of artefacts to convey messages of Christian faith must be seen in connection with that frontier, since such evidence is rare on contemporary sites in Ukraine, Poland, or Slovakia.¹²⁷

On Light and Darkness

The Empire of Justinian had a short period of glory and a long agony. During all that time, the Walachian Plain was in the shadow of the Empire, with coruscations of historical interest during Roman punitive campaigns, such as that chronicled in the *Feldzugsjournal* incorporated into Theophylact Simocatta's *History*.¹²⁸ Under permanent control from the Roman bridgehead in Sucidava and already settled by Slavic groups in the east, Walachia was a land of ambiguities. What separated the Roman armies from their enemies was not the Danube, but a vast swamp, neither water nor land. Archaeology confirms this record of ambiguity: the pottery is of Roman tradition, but of 'barbarian' fabric; the settlements indicate a sedentary population, but are all ephemeral;¹²⁹ in archaeological terms, the 'Romance population' looks barbarian and the 'barbarians' Roman; the inhabitants of the Ipotești-Cândești villages were Christian, but practiced cremation; on feasts they took out their pots decorated with crosses, while wearing 'Slavic' bow fibulae or Roman brooches with bent stem, depending upon circumstances. Ambiguity takes over the historiography of the problem, as the light sometimes comes from the East, sometimes from the South.¹³⁰ Most

¹²⁷ An exception is the cross on a pot published by Fusek, *Slovensko*, pl. XIII/1, dated 570–650, but in this case the template is done by tacking, not by incision, as in Lower Danube area. It is worth mentioning at this point the issue of clay rolls with incised crosses, such as found in Lazuri (for which see Stanciu, 'Așezarea slavă timpurie', pls. 15/2, perhaps also 36/1).

¹²⁸ Beginning with Book VI, Theophylact relied on an official report or bulletin, which H. W. Haussig called *Feldzugsjournal*. See H. W. Haussig, 'Theophylakts Exkurs über die skythischen Völker', *Byzantion*, 23 (1953), 275–462; Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 49–50.

¹²⁹ See Teodor, 'Ceramica de uz comun din Muntenia', chapters 6 to 10 on the shifting settlements of the Ipotești-Cândești culture. Most settlements in the Walachian Plain may not have existed for too long, judging from the absence of any deposition between houses (unlike the situation in Rashkov and Kodyn). By contrast, the contemporary Pen'kovka sites at Molești (Republic of Moldova) produced a rich array of artefacts found outside the buildings. See Ioan Tentiuc, 'Siturile din secolele V–VII de la Molești-Ialoveni (Republica Moldova)', *Arheologia Moldovei*, 21 (1998), 201–12.

¹³⁰ Curta, 'Changing Image', denounces the flagrant inconsistencies of the Romanian archaeology in terms of ethnic attributions. Stanciu, 'Cercetarea arheologică', highlights the sharp contradictions between Romanian archaeologists and foreign scholars, especially from neighbouring countries.

recently, we have learned that the Slavs are 'Slavs',¹³¹ which is a very different matter, since by now ambiguity has received its theoretical underpinnings. This, however, seems to be just the beginning of a long process of revision (see Fig. 11, as an example of how difficult is the concept of 'Slavic culture' itself).

Until now, most scholars agreed that no 'assimilation of the Slavs' took place in the 500s, at least not in the Walachian Plain.¹³² The main argument is the lack of archaeological evidence for the contrary, with the only, but notable, exception of the Sărata Monteoru cemetery (a site that has much more to do with Bulgarian than with Romanian history). Then there is the linguistic evidence, only recently acknowledged by archaeologists.¹³³ There are also historical arguments: assimilation is only possible when the assimilated population is in demographic decline. But the opposite seems to be true for the 500s. Judging from the written evidence, this was a period of Slavic expansion, not recession. By contrast, nothing indicates an expansion of the local, non-Slavic population, which seems to have been on the verge of disappearing. The Byzantine campaigns against both Avars and Slavs in the late 500s left the entire region devastated. What seems to have happened then is that, while all combatants seem to have been exhausted by the conflict, the demographic and ethnic configuration of the region was drastically altered. Unfortunately, there is still no archaeological way to bring more light into the darkness.

¹³¹ Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, esp. pp. 335–50. To Curta, 'Sclavenes' (too often viewed as 'Slavs') is just a label used by early Byzantine authors. Instead of referring to a discrete ethnic group on the ground, this label was an umbrella term for all barbarians viewed from the same geopolitical angle, namely as a certain kind of enemy to the Empire. Despite Procopius's claims that the Sclavenes and the Antes spoke the same language (*Wars* 7.14.22–26, ed. by Haury, trans. by Dewing), this should not be treated as an ethnic attribute, but as a *lingua franca* in *Barbaricum*. To date, Curta's thesis is the most coherent explanation for the fundamental incongruence between written and archaeological evidence. My own studies suggest persuasively (at least to myself) that there was no 'proto-Slavic' core of material culture.

¹³² Luca and Mândescu, *Rituri și ritualuri funerare*, p. 70, point to the strong evidence of 'parallel lives' in separate communities, with little, if any, evidence of coexistence within the same settlement.

¹³³ Ioan Pătruș, 'Despre vechimea relațiilor lingvistice slavo-române', *Cercetări de lingvistică*, 14 (1969), 23–29; Gheorghe Mihăilă, 'Aspecte teoretice și istorice ale studierii raporturilor lingvistice vechi slavo-române', *Studii și cercetări de lingvistică*, 33 (1982), 57–66; Peter R. Petrucci, *Slavic Features in the History of Rumanian* (Munich, 1999). The arguments of the former two authors were acknowledged by Madgearu, *Continuitate și discontinuitate culturală*, p. 174, when concluding that no assimilation of the Slavs could have taken place before the ninth century. Diaconu, 'Cui aparține cultura Ciurel?', pp. 492–93, draws a somewhat different conclusion: to him assimilation was not possible before the ninth century, because no Romance population existed in the region to assimilate the Slavs.

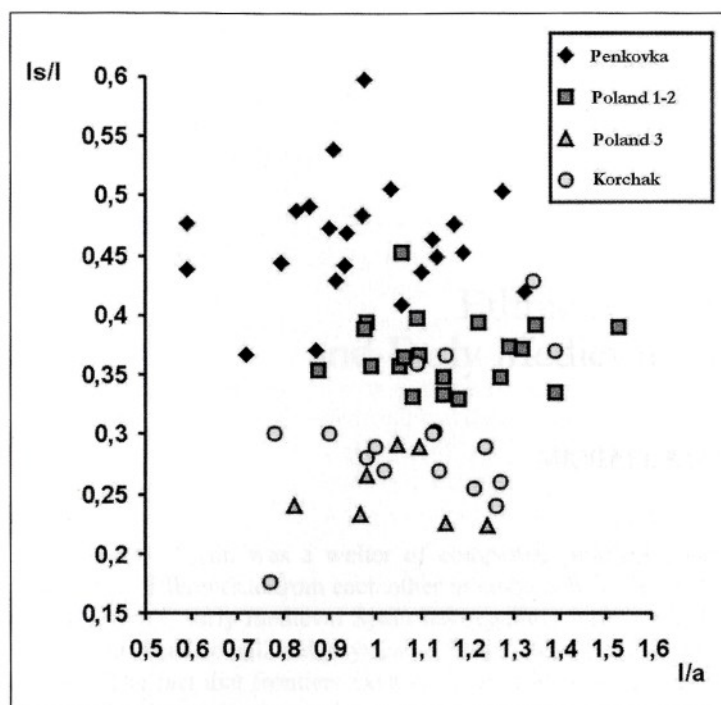


Figure 11. Height ratios: 'l/a' is height at belly diameter, 'Is/l' is upper height per overall height. 'Pen'kovka' and 'Korchak' are used for comparison; 'Poland 1, 2, 3' are the main morphological types found in assemblages from south and south-east Poland. 'Poland 3' is rare in the south (the Upper Vistula valley), but frequent in the south-east (the San River basin). This suggests that the 'Slavic culture' is not homogeneous, and that the ceramic assemblages from neighbouring sites may be very different.